



*Pima County Health Department*  
**Consumer Health and Food Safety**

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## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **For Immediate Release**

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### **Pima County Health Department issues warning about risks of eating raw oysters August 5 is National Oyster Day**

**TUCSON, Ariz.** – Eating raw oysters with a squeeze of lemon or a dash of hot sauce is considered by many to be a delicious treat. However, on National Oyster Day, the Pima County Health Department is reminding people that when eaten raw, this tasty mollusk poses certain health risks and can even be fatal for some people.

*Vibrio*, naturally occurring bacteria found in marine and estuarine waters throughout the world, are found in higher concentrations in the summer months as water becomes warmer. Oysters feed by filtering water around areas where *Vibrio* may thrive and as a result concentrate the bacteria in their meat. Eating raw or undercooked oysters is one way people become infected with *Vibrio* bacteria.

This bacterium may cause gastrointestinal illness in healthy people, but individuals with liver disease such as cirrhosis, chronic medical conditions such as kidney disease, iron disorders, diabetes or compromised immune systems are at a high risk of severe infection or death.

On a list of common myths about raw oysters, the Food and Drug Administration explains that even an experienced oyster lover cannot tell a good oyster from a bad one. There is no change to the taste, odor or appearance of seafood contaminated by *Vibrio*, which creates a significant challenge for food safety officials and consumers who cannot rely on their senses to determine if an oyster is safe.

The Pima County Health Department recommends that if you are going to eat oysters, you follow these guidelines:

- Oysters should be thoroughly cooked by frying, stewing or roasting, which eliminates harmful bacteria and viruses in the meat.
- Whether you've purchased seafood that is fresh or frozen, always keep it cold.
- Never leave perishable items in a hot car unless packed in ice or in a cooler; seafood products must be kept cold to ensure peak quality.
- Always wash hands thoroughly with hot, soapy water before preparing foods and after handling raw seafood.

For more information on *Vibrio* and the risks of eating raw oysters and clams, please call 243-7800.

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